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1972/01/27

142d Plenary Session on Viet-Nam Held at Paris

Following are remarks made by Ambassador William J. Porter, head of the U.S. delegation, at the 142d plenary session of the meetings on Viet-Nam at Paris on January 27.

Press release 24 dated January 27

OPENING REMARKS

Ladies and gentlemen: Ambassador Lam has just submitted for your consideration, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam and the Government of the United States, a plan for peace which can bring an end to the war in Viet-Nam. It is a plan designed to bring about a lasting peace throughout Indochina through a negotiated settlement that is fair to all concerned.

This proposal is comprehensive in nature, covering all military and political issues, and would be negotiated and signed in complete form as an overall agreement in principle. After signature, we would proceed to negotiate further on the implementation of the various elements of the agreement, in order to sign the final agreement.

Our governments are aware that negotiating on some aspects of the agreement in principle could prove more difficult and complex than on others and may require more time. We would be willing, therefore, once there is overall agreement in principle, to begin implementing certain military aspects of the agreement, such as those affecting withdrawals and prisoners, while we continued to negotiate on other aspects. However, in connection with troop withdrawals, I wish to make clear that although they could start on the date of the agreement in principle, they would not be totally completed before a final agreement on all aspects of the proposal is signed. We would thus be moving on withdrawals and prisoners while the further details of the final agreement, such as the election, are being negotiated.

This comprehensive plan represents an effort by us to respond to the global nature of your proposals as they have been outlined. My comments are intended also to emphasize our desire to be as flexible as possible so that we can speed the negotiations.

We will endeavor to respond to any questions you may have or any clarifications you may seek with respect to the proposal, which is a serious attempt to meet those proposals already brought forward by your side. In presenting this proposal, our purpose is to try to break the deadlock here. Please give this plan the careful attention it deserves.

ADDITIONAL REMARKS

Ladies and gentlemen: Let me try to clarify the points that you raised. With regard to the first request for clarification—I think I am correct in calling it a request for clarification—concerning which forces are to be withdrawn: Our proposal contains a provi-

sion for total withdrawal. "Total" is not a word which requires much explanation. There is no provision for military personnel, military equipment, or the use of bases in South Viet-Nam after that withdrawal is complete.

With regard to your question, or reference, to stopping the use of United States air or naval forces in Viet-Nam, I refer you to point 6, which declares there will be a general cease-fire throughout Indochina, to begin when the agreement is signed. As part of the agreement and as part of the cease-fire, there will be no infiltration of outside forces into any of the countries of Indochina.

In the second area of your questions, you make the statement that an election would be organized under the "Saigon regime"—by which I assume you mean the present Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam. But the declaration of both governments makes it very clear that the election would not be in the hands of any government in power at that time. The provision in our declaration for independent electoral machinery should take care of your fears in this area, if you would participate in that election machinery which would be set up according to the agreement and in which all political elements could take part. Furthermore, in connection with elections, there will be international supervision, as envisaged in this proposal of the two governments.

In connection with your fears about the United States role, with that in mind the proposal also contains definite assurances that we will be in no way involved, neither will we support candidates, and we will be completely neutral. The United States will also abide by the outcome of the election and of any other political process shaped by the South Vietnamese people themselves. I do not see how assurances can be any clearer or more categoric.

Now, third—your third area of questions with regard to the secret meetings: The difficulty here arose when you broke off the secret meetings while giving the impression publicly that we had not responded to your seven- and nine-point proposals. Your intention to deceive our people and your own by so doing was not admirable.

Finally, I would like to ask whether your final question or statement about withdrawal, to the effect that agreement in that area would be hindered by discussions in the political domain, whether by that you imply that you would like to separate the military (that is, withdrawal and prisoners of war) discussions from the political aspects of our proposal. It would be helpful if you could clarify this question.

THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE BULLET

VOL. LXVI, No. 1708
February 14, 1972

The Department of State BULL
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